

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 268 095

SP 027 394

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TITLE A Partnership Between a College of Education and a School District to Improve the Preparation of Teachers.
PUB DATE Feb 86
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators (Atlanta, GA, February 22-26, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Colleges; *Cooperative Programs; *Educational Cooperation; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Inservice Teacher Education; *Preservice Teacher Education; *School Districts
IDENTIFIERS Lesley College MA; Spring Independent School District TX

ABSTRACT

Lesley College (Massachusetts) and a Texas school district have collaborated in preparing new teachers. The Lesley College/Spring, Texas partnership challenges traditional delineations of responsibilities in teacher education. Preservice and inservice education are shared responsibilities of both the college and the school district. Third year undergraduate education majors must compete to participate in the program. To be considered, they present a professional resume, videotapes and audiotapes of their teaching, and a portfolio of other evidence of personal and professional achievement. Their academic and communication skills must be strong. If chosen, students complete a senior practicum and are thereafter guaranteed a first year teaching position with the Spring Independent School District. During their first year of teaching, ongoing guidance and support are provided by a faculty member. (Author/CB)

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A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN A COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND A SCHOOL DISTRICT
TO IMPROVE THE PREPARATION OF TEACHERS

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ATE, February 1986

A Partnership Between A College Of Education And A School District
To Improve The Preparation Of Teachers

Where does the responsibility for teacher preparation lie? Traditionally, the entry level teacher has been seen as a "product" of the college he/she attended. With the exception of the student teaching practicum there has been little or no involvement in undergraduate teacher education by school practitioners. After graduation, in-service education of entry level teachers has been conducted by the employer school district. With the exception of a few special offerings to alumni during reunions or other such events, the role of the alma mater in the graduate's continuing education has been minimal.

The lines of responsibility, then, for pre-service and in-service education have been clearly established by tradition and practice: Pre-service education has been the domain of the college or university; in-service education that of the school district. This article describes a unique cooperative venture which challenges the common delineation of roles in the education of new teachers.

The Partnership

The Lesley College/Spring, Texas Partnership Project is an attempt to blur the previous distinctions between the responsibilities of the college and school district in the education of teachers. For almost two years [the education student's senior semester of undergraduate student teaching and first year of employment as a teacher], the college and the school district work together to educate the teacher and evaluate the teaching performance. Participants in the program are guaranteed a one-year teaching position with the partner school district upon graduation from college.

The Partners--Lesley College and Spring, Texas
Independent School District

The partnership is between Lesley College, a private women's undergraduate college specializing primarily in teacher education in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the Spring, Texas Independent School District, a suburban community near Houston. Although separated geographically by hundreds of miles, the partners in this collaboration are well-matched. Each year, between 75-100 Lesley College seniors graduate, prepared for teaching in the areas of early childhood, elementary, middle school or special education. These students have completed a curriculum combining a strong emphasis on liberal arts education with a four year field-based professional program. The Spring, Texas School District is a growing community, regularly hiring new teachers and valuing the "mix" of liberal arts and education components for its new teachers. One of the district's central objectives is the recruitment of excellent new teachers. The Director of Personnel has an extensive national travel schedule aimed at accomplishment of this objective. This Partnership attempts to match exemplary student teachers with a school district where their professional growth will be nurtured by both members of the partnership.

Eligibility for Participation

This is a competitive program. Selection of participants occurs during the student's junior year. In order to qualify, a student must be currently enrolled in a "junior placement" [most Lesley students complete a semester of student teaching during each of their junior and senior years]. A participant must demonstrate academic excellence, success in previous field-based experiences, skills in written and oral communication, and interest in participating in an innovative program and locating in Spring, Texas, upon graduation. Recommendations regarding a student's professional skills are obtained from her cooperating practitioner, her college supervisor, and her

instructor in an Educational Psychology class. The student presents a professional portfolio, containing lesson plans, unit plans, photographs of bulletin boards, video and audio tapes of lessons, teaching materials, games, etc. -- i.e., any evidences of her teaching abilities and experiences. In addition, she submits a resume and a written application. The designing of the professional portfolio is seen as a valuable educative process. With the assistance of Lesley faculty, the student attempts to demonstrate how her experiences and education have prepared her for a very successful senior practicum.

The student participates in group and individual interviews with the Personnel Director of the Spring School District. After this initial screening, final selection is made by the Personnel Director and a teacher or principal from the school district. The major criterion used by the selecting group is the potential for outstanding entry level teaching performance.

The Program--Phase One [Student Teaching]

The student teacher is assigned to a classroom in the Spring School District. She remains in her practicum for an entire semester, progressing from observing and small group teaching to taking full instructional responsibilities. She is guided carefully and closely by her cooperating teacher.

Cooperating teachers are chosen based on their demonstrated strong skills as master teachers. They have expressed an interest and eagerness in participating in an innovative program and in involving themselves in the professional development of a new teacher. In order to satisfy Massachusetts' requirements for certification, they must be appropriately certified, and have been teachers in good standing for at least three years and, therefore, eligible for tenure.

In addition to working closely with the classroom cooperating teacher, the

student teacher is matched with a supervisor. Because of the long distance between the college and the practicum site, creative procedures for providing supervision are necessary. It is crucial that the quality of supervision be high, in order to provide support to student teachers, ensure good communication between student teachers and cooperating teachers, and provide the accountability necessary for the program to be successful.

The supervisor, like the cooperating teacher, is based in the Spring District schools. The supervisor may be a principal, curriculum supervisor, or classroom teacher. In any case, the supervisor comes to the college for intensive training prior to the student teaching phase. [Although an employee of Spring School District, the supervisor is in this role accountable to Lesley College, informed and supportive of the standards of the College for student teachers.] He/she must have had successful classroom teaching experience, and must have at least a Master's degree in Education. Previous supervision experience is highly desirable.

Supervision of student teachers is ongoing and frequent. Formative and summative evaluation of the student teacher is done jointly by the cooperating teacher and college supervisor. Criteria for evaluation include the standards for teacher certification in Massachusetts and expectations jointly agreed upon between college and school district personnel. The supervisor communicates regularly with a designated Lesley faculty member in Cambridge regarding progress of the program.

During the practicum, at least three formal three-way conferences are held between the student teacher, cooperating teacher and college supervisor. At these times, standards and expectations are clearly communicated, and the student's progress assessed. Goals for future improvement are noted. A final conference includes self-evaluation by the student and formal evaluation by

both the teacher and supervisor.

In addition to the three-way conferences, the supervisor meets regularly and frequently with the student teacher in order to discuss issues of relevance to the practicum. The supervisor facilitates the involvement of the student teacher in professional activities beyond the classroom context, such as faculty meetings, parent conferences, district-wide in-service opportunities, etc.

The Program--Phase Two [First Year of Teaching]

After graduation from Lesley College, the new teacher is employed for at least one year by the Spring School District. During this year, the college and the district continue to collaborate in the professional development of the new teacher.

As a teaching employee of the school district, the new teacher is entitled to a wide range of in-service workshops and other opportunities within the district. In addition, she is assigned a faculty mentor from the college. This person, based in Cambridge, maintains regular communication with the new teacher. Feedback and support for the new teacher are given. Both audiotapes and videotapes are used to bridge the geographical gap between mentor and teacher; the new teacher sends tapes of her teaching and receives analyses and suggestions for improvement from her mentor.

In addition, a "social network" attempts to build an esprit de corps among the participants. Texas-based graduates from the college are available for providing local information and social activities. A "buddy system" between senior student teachers, first year employed teachers and these alumnae provides a "support group" for all concerned.

Risks and Benefits for Partners and Participants

Who benefits from this sharing of resources and responsibilities? The first group of participants believes that there are gains to be made on all

sides. The partnership may be a pilot worth replicating between other colleges and school districts. A close look at the benefits and risks will be helpful for readers interested in a similar venture.

The student teacher/new teacher surely gains from this kind of partnership. The enthusiasm surrounding such an innovative program is likely to mean that student teachers will be well received. Furthermore, they have competed for the honor of participating and are therefore recognized as excellent teaching candidates. As the School District is assured of these student teachers remaining on as first year teachers, more than the usual amounts of assistance and support are predictable. The District is investing in its own future employees and has the semester of student teaching to influence and educate the new teacher, before she is on the payroll -- a "head start" on the usual sequence! This "head start" then, represents a benefit not only for the student teacher, but also for the District.

During both the student teaching and first year employment phases, the student teacher/teacher receives support and assistance simultaneously from two sources -- the College and the School District. As pointed out earlier, such is not usually the case and represents a clear benefit.

The major advantage to the student participant is, of course, the guaranteed job. In these days of shortages for teacher positions in some parts of the country, it is not uncommon for much of one's senior year to be involved with resume writing, interviewing, and recruitment conference-attending. Many candidates for teaching positions spend great amounts of time and money on these and other job-seeking activities. For the participant in this kind of partnership, these chores are eliminated and time gained during the senior year may be spent beginning to be a professional. The student teacher is able to begin carving her own niche in her first place of employment! She, too, is

investing in her future.

In addition to becoming an earlier influence on its future employees, there are other advantages in this partnership for the School District. Key to the program's success is the District's having the final word on the choice of student teacher participants. With clearly stated, competitive criteria, the District is choosing new employees from the best candidates available. Furthermore, thriving districts which are hiring many new teachers each year benefit from the earlier [and more selective] hiring process.

The ongoing relationship with the College of Education represents another "boon" for the School District. There are enhanced opportunities for communication about the shared objective of educating the new teacher. For the School District, this represents the chance to influence the pre-service education of its future employees.

What are the advantages for the College of Education in such an arrangement? A major benefit is the opportunity to receive information about the quality of its pre-student teaching program. As more and more participants work in the partner school district, useful, reliable feedback should emerge about the participants' undergraduate curriculum.

While receiving evaluative information about its programs and its graduates, the College still has the opportunity, through its faculty mentor/new teacher component, to continue in its efforts to educate the new teacher and influence positively the ranks of the profession.

Other benefits exist for the partner college. The pressures of the economy and the current stinging criticisms of teacher education are forces with which to be reckoned. This partnership positively addresses both forces: A high job placement rate is crucial for a college of education. In addition, the emphasis on excellence inherent in this competitive program is laudable.

With any innovation worth trying, risks as well as potential benefits

exist and must be faced. What are the risks in this partnership? In general, these are summed up by the recognition that each member of this venture is going beyond usual limits: Each party -- the student teacher, School District and College of Education -- is challenging traditional boundaries. A student teacher is risking being not chosen by an employer early in her career. If chosen, she is risking an early commitment to an employer. Her employer too is making the early commitment risk! The College of Education is risking its former hold on pre-service education by sharing that role with the School District. Furthermore, there is the risk of reputation and credibility in such careful evaluation of its students and professional programs.

The risks do indeed exist. Minimizing these risks will necessitate clear and regular communication and a sense of trust between participants. The risks are worth making: The present clamor for reform of teacher education mandates a careful and skeptical scrutiny of current boundaries of responsibilities in the education of teachers. The College of Education and the School District share the accountability for the quality of our nation's teachers. Cooperation toward improving that quality is essential. Perhaps partnerships of this nature will provide a fresh perspective on traditionally held beliefs and practices.